

# Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

25636 N. Mosiertown Rd Crossingville, PA 1641 Rev. Fr. Daniel Mathewson – *Rector* **Lord’s Day – Feb 4th , 2018** Parish phone: 814-734-3801 Find us on the Web at: [www.orthodoxcrossingville.org](http://www.orthodoxcrossingville.org) or on Face book: Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

## GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST !

**SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON — Tone 2. Afterfeast of the Meeting. Ven. Isidore of Pelusium (ca. 436-440).** Rt. Blv. George, Great Prince of Vladimir (1238). Ven. Kirill (Cyril), Abbot and Wonderworker of Novoezérsk (Novgorod—1532). Ven. Abraham and Coprius, of Pechenga (Vologdá—15th c.). Martyr Jadorus (3rd c.). Hieromartyr Abramius, Bishop of Arbela in Assyria (ca. 344-347). Ven. Nicholas the Confessor, Abbot of Studion (868).

PLEASE INCLUDE THESE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN YOUR DAILY PRAYERS: Those in need –Fr. Andrew, Fr. David, Mat. Donna, Fr. John, Fr. Nicholas, Fr. Paul, Fr. George, Mat. Suzanne, Melissa, Meghan, Pearl, Karen, John, Mary, Stavros, Marilyn, Theona, Sara, Eugene, John, Ann, Thomas, Catherine, Timothy, Jeremiah, Renee, Delani, Emily, The Homebound... Vincent, Tanya, Richard, Helen, John, Irene, Ruth, Josephine, William, Claudia... Travelers..Dankos ...Catechumens –Rick and Christian Our Missionaries Abroad...Fr. David and Mt. Rozanne, Military servers...Greg ...Departed Orthodox...Newly Departed – Ann, Katherine. Vernon, Paul, James, Andrew, Peter, Paul, Margaret, Michael Mary Ann, Timothy special requests... Anthony, Ian, Paul, Daleen, Penni, James, Sean, Liam, Susan, James, Joel, Jen, Roger, Jasmine, Cassandra, Raquel ....

Today’s Hymns **Tone 2** **Troparion** *(Resurrection)*

**When You descended to death, O Life Immortal, You destroyed hell with the splendor of Your Godhead. And when from the depths You raised the dead, all the powers of heaven cried out:// “O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You!”**

In 1859, Samuel Smiles, a Scottish author and government reformer, published the book, *Self-Help*, the first self-proclaimed work on self-improvement. His opening line is famous, “God helps those who help themselves.” Indeed, many modern people are under the impression that this statement comes from Scripture (it does not). It is not at all accidental that Smiles’ thought should echo that of the Scottish Enlightenment itself. We can build a better world, and do so more effectively by building better humans.

Christianity was to be harnessed in this great progressive drive.

We look to our faith to solve problems. Whether we suffer from psychological wounds, or simple poverty and failure, we look to God for help. The spiritual life, and the “techniques” we imagine to be associated with it, are the means by which we “help ourselves” (God will do the rest).

This narrative is simply not part of the Christian faith. The progress/improvement/better-life scenario does not jibe with the account of the Christian life as given in the New Testament and the Tradition. Verses, such as, John 10:10 (“that they might have life more abundantly”), are “cherry-picked” and drafted into the false narrative of an improved existence. Consider instead this word from St. Isaac of Syria: “...without tribulations befalling us, God’s providence cannot be perceived.”

St. Isaac’s statement is fully in line with the New Testament. There, we are not presented with the solution to our problems, nor with the promise of a better world. Rather, we are taught how to live in repentance and participate daily in the life of the Kingdom of God. That the life of the Kingdom of God is full of joy and transcendence is not at all the same thing as success or improvement. The lives of the saints are filled with information of an opposite sort.

- Mary of Egypt is directed into the desert by the voice of the Mother of God. She lives miraculously on very little food. But she tells of seventeen years of virtual torture as she battled the temptations that had governed her previously sinful life. Our daily trials would seem as nothing in comparison.
- Silouan the Athonite related a period of 15 years in which he had no sense of God’s presence, but was instead tortured by demons.
- Seraphim of Sarov spent years in prayer and fasting, was beaten, robbed and left a cripple.

Many modern readers first encounter the Jesus Prayer in the classic work, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. It is a work of pious fiction that offers some basic instruction and incentive towards the practice of the Prayer. It can also be misleading. In a *matter of months*, following instruction from a holy elder, the Pilgrim finds that the prayer has entered his heart and become “self-acting.” A blind man with whom he shares the prayer masters it in even less time and gains the ability to see things at a great distance. I know of modern cases where the Prayer came in what seemed an easy manner, but those cases are not stories of technique – they are singular gifts of grace that seem directed towards a very specific purpose. Most people never have an experience of “self-acting” prayer. It is extremely rare, even among monastics.

The prayer and fasting, almsgiving and confession that are the very heart of the Orthodox way of life are not techniques or ways of self-improvement and betterment. They are the embracing of a way of life in which self-improvement and betterment are beside the point. To observe “improvement” in ourselves is to abandon the way of humility and repentance. It is the nature of the Orthodox way that we become increasingly aware of our *failures* rather than our progress.

Christ said, “. . .when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’” (Lk. 17:10)

Accepting this represents a change of mind within the modern context. Indeed, the very word for repentance in Greek means a “change of mind” (*metanoia*). Christianity should not and properly cannot be a subset of the modern lifestyle. Most likely, if carefully followed, it will ruin all our modern plans. Well and good! The Kingdom of God will not be populated by the successful, the well-adjusted and the wise. It is the failures, the foolish, and the fragile who will enter ahead of us, or at least those who were willing to risk their lives in such a manner. The modern narrative is not only false, it creates expectations that are never truly met. Our media torments us with carefully crafted examples of those for whom self-improvement and personal progress seem to work. We can only wonder why it fails to work for us! These are false images that belie the normative struggle of human existence in every age.<sup>1</sup>

If you are having a difficult time, you are not alone. It is the very nature of human life. That same struggle, however, united with Christ in His Cross, becomes transformative – not in the manner that the world expects, but in the likeness of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AND SERVICES

**~~~ Church School Today— Holy Water container craft continues Family Bowling Outing Feb. 11th following Pancake Breakfast in Cambridge Springs. 1-4pm**

### THIS MONTH—

**- No Orthodox Bible Study — 6pm @ The Tarot Bean Café-Meadville, PA Resuming Thursday March 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>**

**- Altar Servers - see schedule in office**

**- Parish Council Meeting – Wed. Feb. 7th**

**- GREAT AND HOLY LENT BEGINS Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>**

**-Ladies Altar Meeting- Sunday Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> (Following Coffee hour)**

**-Men’s Fellowship Meeting - Mon. following the Canon of St.**

**Andrew**

**-Genevive and The Irish Dancers will preform at the Burbon Barrel Pub on state on Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> from 5-9pm.**

## MISSIONS TEAM

Anyone wishing to serve as a missionary for a summer trip may inquire of the missions team. Also, OCMC sponsors various trips around the world. See the poster in the Hall. \*Please support our Kenyan Orthodox children. Please contact Marilyn Filipos. Thank you for your donations to the Kenyan children. (Work days for Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>)

## House Blessings

Fr. Daniel will continue House blessings until Feb. 18<sup>th</sup> please contact him to schedule a time.

“Rejoice” scripture verse for the week:

**1 Thess. 5:16 Rejoice always.**

**Tone 1 Troparion** (*The Meeting of our Lord in the Temple*)  
**Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Full of Grace!**  
**From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, ^Christ our God,**  
**enlightening those who sat in darkness.**  
**Rejoice and be glad, O righteous Elder,**  
**you accepted in your arms the ^Redeemer of our souls,**  
**Who grants us the Resurrection!**

**Tone 3 Kontakion** (*from the Lenten Triodion*)  
**I have recklessly forgotten Your glory, O Father;**  
**and among sinners I have scattered the riches which You gave**  
**me. And now I cry to You as the Prodigal:**  
**“I have sinned before You, O merciful Father;**  
**receive me a penitent,**  
**and make me as one of Your hired servants!”**

**Tone 1 Kontakion** (*The Meeting of our Lord in the Temple*)  
**By Your Nativity You sanctified the Virgin’s womb**  
**and blessed Simeon’s hands, ^O Christ God.**  
**Now You have come and saved us through love.**  
**Grant peace to all Orthodox Christians,**  
**O only Lover of Man!**

**Tone 2 Prokeimenon**  
**The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my**  
**salvation. (Ps 117/118:4)**  
*v: The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me*  
*over to death. (Ps 117/118:18)*

**Tone 3 Prokeimenon** (*Song of the Theotokos*)  
**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my**  
**Savior. (Lk 1:46-47)**

**Tone 2**  
**Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!**

*v: May the Lord hear you in the day of trouble! May the name of*  
*the God of Jacob protect you! (Ps 19/20:1)*

*v: Save the King, O Lord, and hear us on the day we call! (Ps*  
*19/20:9)*

**Tone 8**  
*v: Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your*  
*word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation! (Lk 2:29)*

## **Today’s Scripture Readings:**

### **1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (Epistle)**

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

### **Luke 15:11-32 (Gospel)**

Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’” And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

## **The Slow Road to Heaven – Why the Spiritual Life Doesn’t “Work”**

---Fr. Stephen Freeman

We live in a world of practicality, a fact that has produced the marvels of technology that power us along and connect the world in its web. I have a nearly two-year-old grandson who has grasped some of this connection for many months now. He loves buttons – not the ones on your shirt – but the ones on any device. If there is a button in reach, he will mash it. He’s not alone, I’ve seen the same phenomenon throughout the herd of children that crowd my parish. Push a button; make something happen. If a toddler grasps the magic of a button, so, too, do adults. It is something of an icon our culture. If there is a problem, from cancer to poverty, we want solutions. This is also true of our spiritual expectations. But it is worth asking, “Does the spiritual life work?”

Chapter 3 in AA’s Big Book is entitled, “How it works.” It describes the 12-Steps with a commentary. It also assures that its program “works.” And it does, for a portion of those who participate. One set of statistics from peer reviewed studies put the AA success rate at [less than 10 percent](#). AA sets it higher – perhaps as much as 33 percent. I endorse their program and encourage anyone with an addiction to participate in a 12-Step program. The numbers, however, are of interest. What I understand from these studies is that addiction is a very powerful force in some lives and can meet with failure in the face of well-designed cures.

I have wondered how the “success” of the spiritual life would be measured? I could imagine that the number of persons Baptized might be compared to the number of the Baptized who fall short of salvation – but there is no way to discover such a thing. In lieu of that, we often set up our own way of measuring – some expectation of “success” that we use to judge the spiritual life. “I tried Christianity...” the now self-described agnostic relates, “and found that it did not live up to its claims.”

To my mind, the entire question is a little like complaining about your hammer because it doesn’t work well as a screw-driver. The problem is that the spiritual life doesn’t “work,” and was never supposed to. It is not something that “works,” it is something that “lives.” And this is an extremely important distinction.